TRANSFORMING THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Improving student learning and educational equity require strong, consistent, and sustained collaboration among parents, teachers, school boards, superintendents and administrators, business leaders, and the community. And such improvements require that we all take responsibility for the academic and social well-being of the students in our charge. It is in this spirit of collaboration that we offer this joint statement on elevating the teaching profession to improve the education of our students.

THE CHALLENGE

The education system we created in the 20th century served our nation well. We were a world leader in universal high school attendance and in higher education attainment, and we opened our doors to all students. And though our educated citizenry helped fuel a sustained period of rapid economic growth, the goal of educating all students to the same high levels has not yet been realized. The fast-paced, dynamic, global world of the 21st century places new demands on all of us, as citizens and as workers. To productively engage in our democracy and compete in our global economy, all students will need strong, well-rounded academic foundations; cultural and global competencies; the ability to collaborate, communicate, and solve problems; and strong digital literacy skills. And their teachers and principals – who are critical to ensuring this high-quality education – need a similar and wide range of knowledge, skills, and strategies to guide their students. Now more than ever, to meet the challenges that confront us, we must take bold steps to transform and elevate the teaching profession to ensure that highly skilled and effective educators are at the helm.

THE GOAL

There is no one path to success. Different districts, schools, principals, and teachers will employ different approaches and take different pathways. But the goal remains constant: that every student exits high school prepared for postsecondary study, well-informed as a citizen, and ready for the workplace. We therefore judge our success in transforming the teaching profession by our students' outcomes:

- High levels of student achievement, judged by multiple measures that assess students' ability to understand and apply the knowledge and skills that matter most to their readiness for college, careers, and citizenship;
- Increased equity, judged by continuously narrowing the gaps in achievement and opportunity between more and less privileged populations of students; and
- Increased global competitiveness, judged by American students' academic performance on internationally benchmarked measures.

THE ELEMENTS OF A TRANSFORMED PROFESSION

The core elements of a transformed profession will include—

1. A Culture of Shared Responsibility and Leadership: In a transformed profession, educators take collective ownership for student learning; structures of shared decision-making and open-door practice provide educators with the collaborative autonomy to do what is best for each student; and the profession takes upon itself the responsibility for ensuring that high standards of practice are met. In this professional culture, teachers and principals together make the primary decisions about educator selection, assignment, evaluation, dismissal, and career advancement – with student learning at the center of all such decisions.

2. Top Talent, Prepared for Success: Students with effective teachers perform at higher levels; they have higher graduation rates, higher college-going rates, higher levels of civic participation, and higher lifetime earnings. Thus, attracting a high-performing and diverse pool of talented individuals to become teachers and principals is a critical priority – whether these are new graduates or career switchers, and whether they enter the profession through traditional or alternative pathways. We must support programs that prepare highly effective educators and offer high quality and substantive curricula and clinical preparation experiences. We should expand the most successful programs, help other programs improve, and close down the lowest-performing programs if they fail to improve after receiving support. Preparation should include significant clinical opportunities that involve highly effective teachers or principals to oversee, mentor, and evaluate aspiring educators (preferably in the school environments in which the candidates will ultimately work). Further, aspiring educators must meet a high bar for entering the profession, demonstrating strong knowledge in the content they teach; have mastered a repertoire of instructional strategies and know when to use each appropriately; have the dispositions and aptitudes to work effectively with students and with colleagues; and are learners themselves who know how to plan purposefully, analyze student learning outcomes, reflect on their own practice, and adjust as needed.

3. Continuous Growth and Professional Development: Effective teachers and principals are career-long learners. Effective schools and districts are learning communities where teachers and principals individually and collaboratively continuously reflect on and improve their practice. Such communities of practice thrive when there is structured time for collaborative work informed by a rich array of data and access to internal and external expertise. We must take seriously the need to evaluate the efficacy of professional development so that we can more methodically improve it, channeling our investments into activities and supports that make a difference. From induction for novice teachers designed to accelerate their growth and development, to replicating the practices of the most accomplished teachers, professional development is a critical lever of improvement. As a profession, we must develop greater competency in using it.

4. Effective Teachers and Principals: Effective educators have high standards of professional practice and demonstrate their ability to improve student learning. Thus, effectiveness must be evaluated based on measures of student academic growth, evidence from classroom and school practice, and contributions to colleagues and the school community. The results of the evaluations should guide professional support and development and inform personnel decisions such as teacher and principal assignments, the granting of professional status (e.g., tenure), promotion to leadership roles, and dismissal for those who, despite receiving support, are ineffective. Good evaluation systems should provide feedback to educators from both colleagues and supervisors that is meaningful, credible, and actionable, and should use evidence-based processes that are fair, accurate, and transparent.

5. A Professional Career Continuum with Competitive Compensation: Educators are one of our nation's most valuable resources. We must create a profession that attracts great people into our schools and classrooms – and keeps them in the profession. To do this, we need to offer educators career pathways that provide opportunities for increasingly responsible roles, whether they choose to stay in the classroom, become instructional leaders, or move into administration. And these roles must be coupled with compensation that is high enough to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce; reflects the effectiveness, expertise, and contributions of each educator; and is consistent with the societal regard accorded to comparable professions.

6. Conditions for Successful Teaching and Learning: High-functioning systems can amplify the accomplishments of their educators, but a dysfunctional school or district can undermine the impact of even the best teachers. We need schools and districts whose climates and cultures, use of time, approaches to staffing, use of technology, deployment of support services, and engagement of families and communities are optimized to continuously improve outcomes for the students they serve. Further, we must be prepared to get the best teachers and principals to the highest-need students (including low-income students, minority students, English learners, and students with disabilities), and to ensure that all students have access to the other resources (such as technology; instructional materials; and social, health, and nutritional services) necessary to support their academic success.

7. Engaged Communities: Finally, no community can flourish unless its children are safe, healthy, well-nourished, and well-educated; and no school can be a strong pillar of a thriving community without deep community responsibility for and ownership of the school's academic success. Thus, recognizing that the fate of communities and their schools are inextricably linked, we must make schools stronger by educators embracing community resources, expertise, and activities; and we must make communities stronger by anchoring them around highly effective schools.

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